

Expulsions of Germans after World War II (Part I)

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Introduction

One of the great tragedies of the 20th century was the forced expulsion of ethnic Germans from their ancestral homes in Europe after the end of World War II. The Allies carried out the largest forced population transfer—and perhaps the greatest single movement of people—in human history. A minimum of 12 million and possibly as many as 18.1 million Germans were driven from their homes because of their ethnic background. Probably 2.1 million or more of these German expellees, mostly women and children, died in what was supposed to be an “orderly and humane” expulsion.[\[1\]](#)

One estimate of the number of Germans expelled runs to 16.5 million: 9.3 million within the 1937 Reich borders and 7.2 million outside. The Germans within the 1937 Reich borders include 2,382,000 East Prussians, 1,822,000 East Pomeranians, 614,000 in Brandenburg east of the Oder, and 4,469,000 Silesians. The Germans outside the 1937 Reich borders include 240,000 in Memel and the Baltic States, 373,000 in Danzig, 1,293,000 in Poland, 3,493,000 in Czechoslovakia, 601,000 in Hungary, 509,000 in Yugoslavia, and 785,000 in Romania. The Russians did not expel many of their 1.8 million Volga Germans from the Soviet Union; instead, the Volga Germans were predominantly deported to other (distant) locations within the Soviet Union.[\[2\]](#)

Historical and Legal Bases for Expulsions

The mass expulsion of entire populations after the conclusions of armed conflicts was not in the European tradition. With the exception of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, which sanctioned mutual expulsions after the Greek-Turkish war of 1921-1922, European nations did not contemplate nor carry out resettlement schemes prior to World War II. The Poles and Czechs, however, were determined to forcibly expel their minority populations under the auspices of international organizations. These two governments-in-exile, located in London during most of the war, sought approval from the victorious Allies for the forced expulsion of their German minorities.[\[3\]](#)

The Polish and Czechoslovak governments-in-exile found that the Allies were in complete agreement that the Germans should be expelled from both postwar Poland, which had annexed major portions of the former Germany, and the former Sudetenland. Documents from the Russian archives make it clear that Stalin and Molotov were fully informed about the Polish and Czech plans to deport their Germans. The Soviet leaders told the Czechs and Poles that they not only had no objection in principle to the deportations, but that they also thought positively about them.

Stalin unambiguously endorsed the expulsions in a June 28, 1945 conversation with the Czechoslovak prime minister and deputy foreign minister: “We won't disturb you. Throw them out.” Stalin gave the Polish communist leader Władysław Gomułka advice on how to get the Germans to leave, “You should create such conditions for the Germans that they want to escape themselves.”[\[4\]](#)

Some provisional decisions concerning the expulsion of Germans had been made at the Tehran Conference in December 1943. Stalin wanted to keep the eastern half of Poland which he had acquired pursuant to the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact made with Germany. In order to compensate Poland for her lost territory, East Prussia and perhaps Upper Silesia would be ceded to Poland. Poland

would gain back in the west the same amount of territory she lost in the east. Churchill demonstrated to Stalin his thoughts on a Poland shifted westward with three matchsticks. Stalin was pleased with Churchill's demonstration.^[5]

Edvard Beneš, the president of the Czechoslovak government, justifiably claimed that he had received the blessings of Roosevelt and Churchill for the transfers. Both the American and British governments were sympathetic to the Czechoslovak and Polish cases for expulsion of the Germans and, like the Soviets, had no objection in principle.

Churchill was especially callous on the subject of German expulsions. On October 9, 1944, Churchill remarked to Stalin that 7 million Germans would be killed in the war, thus leaving plenty of room for Germans driven out of Silesia and East Prussia to move into rump Germany. On February 23, 1945, Churchill dismissed the difficulties involved in transferring the German population to the west. Churchill insisted that the transfers would be easy to make since most of the Germans in the territories now taken by the Russians had already left.^[6]

The question is: What moral or legal basis would allow the Allies to expel the ethnic Germans from their homes? The forced expulsion of millions of Germans was a clear violation of the Atlantic Charter signed by the United States and Great Britain in August 1941. The Atlantic Charter had promised in Point Two that there would be no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned. However, the Sudetenland Germans, East Prussians and Silesians were not asked if they wanted to stay in their 700-year-old homelands. They were thrown out against their will.^[7]

British statesmen decided to repudiate the noble principles of the Atlantic Charter. In March 1944, the Earl of Mansfield stated before the British House of Lords: "The Atlantic Charter will not apply to Germany, and therefore there is no reason whatever why we should not contemplate, if not with equanimity, at least without consternation, any unavoidable sufferings that may be inflicted on German minorities in the course of their transference."^[8]

Other British statesmen including Churchill made similar statements that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to Germany. During a debate in the House of Commons on February 23, 1944, Anthony Eden expressed his view of the Atlantic Charter: "There are certain parts of the Atlantic Charter which refer in set terms to victor and vanquished alike. Article Four does so. But we cannot admit that Germany can claim, as a matter of right on her part, whatever our obligation, that any part of the Charter applies to her."

A British Labor MP later acknowledged on March 1, 1945, before the House of Commons: "We started this war with great motives and high ideals. We published the Atlantic Charter and then spat on it, stomped on it and burnt it, as it were, at the stake, and now nothing is left of it."^[9]

The expulsion of ethnic Germans can be viewed in the United States as both a repudiation of the Atlantic Charter and the adoption of the Morgenthau Plan. Section Two of the Morgenthau Plan, which dealt with the "New Boundaries of Germany," stated: "Poland should get that part of East Prussia which doesn't go to the USSR and the southern portion of Silesia." However, the drastic territorial changes finalized at the Potsdam Conference on August 2, 1945 went beyond what even Morgenthau had envisioned. It was agreed at the Potsdam Conference that all German land east of the Oder-Neisse

Rivers that was not under Soviet administration “shall be under the administration of the Polish state.”[\[10\]](#)

The Potsdam Conference was held from July 17 to August 2, 1945, to decide how to administer Germany after her unconditional surrender to the Allies. The goals of the conference included the establishment of postwar order, peace-treaty issues, and remedying the effects of the war, at least on its victors. Participants were the United States represented by President Harry S. Truman, the Soviet Union represented by Joseph Stalin, and Great Britain represented first by Winston Churchill and later by Clement Attlee. In a bitter blow to French pride, France was not invited to the Potsdam Conference. Although the Allies had independently agreed on the need to move the Germans out of Eastern Europe, the discussions at Potsdam indicated that the Americans and British had second thoughts on the expulsion of the Germans.[\[11\]](#)

President Truman at Potsdam expressed his concerns about where 9 million Germans would go. Stalin reassured Truman that most of the Germans had already left. Stalin later noted that the Poles had retained some Germans to work in the fields, but that the Poles would expel them once the harvest was in.

Churchill also stated somewhat disingenuously that “I have grave moral scruples regarding great movements and transfers of populations.” Churchill then added that perhaps the Germans who had left Silesia should be allowed to go back. Stalin told Churchill that the Poles would hang the Germans if they returned. Stalin also said that the Germans had already been driven out of Czechoslovakia, and that there was no need to contact President Beneš about the German expulsion.[\[12\]](#)

Despite the reservations of the Western Allies, at the conclusion of the Potsdam Conference all parties agreed to the transfer of the Eastern Germans. The Western Allies could have said no, but they wanted to avoid any breach with the Soviets. Sir Denis Allen, a member of the British delegation, recalled:

We were then all too well aware—and to a degree hard to picture in retrospect—of our ignorance of what was really happening in Eastern Europe and still more of our inability to influence events there.

If experience of the Nazi era and of war had engendered a certain numbness and indifference to human suffering, it had also bred new hope that, against all the odds, the wartime alliance might be consolidated into a workable system of post-war collaboration in Europe and in the world at large. So there was a widely shared determination not to press concern over events in the East that we could not prevent, to the point where it might maim at birth the Control Council and the United Nations; if hopes were to be frustrated, let it be the Russians and not ourselves who were seen to be responsible.[\[13\]](#)

The Potsdam Conference adopted Article IX of the Potsdam Protocol regarding the German-Polish border and Article XIII regarding the transfer of the Eastern Germans to what was left of Germany. The first paragraph of Article XIII reads: “The Three Governments having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner.”[\[14\]](#)

Article XIII of the Potsdam Protocol was intended to bring the then-ongoing expulsions under a regulated procedure. According to Paragraphs Two and Three of Article XIII, the Allied Control Council in Berlin was to determine how many Germans were to be resettled. Until then a moratorium on expulsion

of the Germans was to be in effect. However, the moratorium was ignored, and the expulsions continued just as before, and during the conference itself.[\[15\]](#)

At Nuremberg the mass deportations perpetrated by the Nazis were included as part of the crimes allegedly committed by the National Socialist government of Germany. On November 20, 1945, Pierre Mounier, assistant prosecutor for France, reproached the accused for having ordered the mass deportations. Mounier stated: "These deportations were contrary to the international conventions, in particular to Article 46 of The Hague Regulations 1907, the laws and customs of war, the general principles of criminal law as derived from the criminal laws of all civilized nations, the internal penal laws of the countries in which such crimes were committed, and to Article 6(b) of the Charter." France's chief prosecutor at Nuremberg also denounced the mass deportations perpetrated by the Nazis as "one of the horrors of our century."[\[16\]](#)

The Nuremberg court expressed the opinion that even in a total war, when a country must fight for its very existence, civil rights and in particular The Hague Convention and its Regulations on Land Warfare place restraints upon those waging war. The mass deportations perpetrated by National Socialist Germany were held to be both a war crime and a crime against humanity. The irony is that while the Nuremberg trials were in progress, the mass deportation of millions of Germans was occurring under the sanction of the same powers whose prosecutors and judges were condemning the mass deportations perpetrated by the Germans.[\[17\]](#)

Bertrand Russell criticized the expulsion of the Germans in a letter to the *London Times*:

In eastern Europe now mass deportations are being carried out by our allies on an unprecedented scale, and an apparently deliberate attempt is being made to exterminate many millions of Germans, not by gas, but by depriving them of their homes and of food, leaving them to die by slow and agonizing starvation. This is done not as an act of war, but as part of a deliberate policy of "peace."

...Are mass deportations crimes when committed by our enemies during war and justifiable measures of social adjustment when carried out by our allies in time of peace? Is it more humane to turn out old women and children to die at a distance than to asphyxiate Jews in gas chambers? Can those responsible for the deaths of those who die after expulsion be regarded as less guilty because they do not see or hear the agonies of their victims? Are the future laws of war to justify the killing of enemy nationals after enemy resistance has ceased?[\[18\]](#)

American historian Ralph Franklin Keeling commented on the hypocrisy of the Potsdam Agreement:

Potsdam calls for annulment of all Nazi laws which established discrimination on grounds of race and declares: "No such discrimination, whether legal, administrative or otherwise, shall be tolerated." Yet these forced migrations of German populations are predicated squarely on rank racial discrimination. The people affected are mostly wives and children of simple peasants, workers, and artisans whose families have lived for centuries in the homes from which they have now been ejected, and whose only offense is their German blood. How "orderly and humane" their banishment has been is now a matter of record.[\[19\]](#)

The Early Expulsions of Germans

For more than three months prior to the Potsdam Agreement on August 2, 1945, the Polish government was expelling German citizens from what it now called the “Recovered Territories”—a reference to the fact that Poland once ruled Silesia and Pomerania under the Piast dynasty 600 years earlier.

Czechoslovakia had been expelling German civilians since mid-May 1945. Although Yugoslavia and Romania had neither asked for nor received permission from the Allies to expel their German citizens, both of these countries soon began large-scale deportations of their German populations. While the expulsions of the Germans were crude and disorganized, they were neither spontaneous nor accidental. Instead, the expulsions were carried out according to a premeditated strategy devised by each of the governments concerned well before the end of the war. [20]

The expelling nations relied almost exclusively on the use of terror to propel their German minorities across the frontiers. Except for a very few instances, deportations as a result of mob actions did not cause the German expulsions. Rather, the so-called “wild expulsions” were carried out primarily by troops, police and militia acting under orders and policies originating at the highest levels of the expelling governments.

So chaotic was the process of expelling the German minorities that many foreign observers, and even many people in the expelling countries themselves, mistook the violent events of the late spring and summer of 1945 as a spontaneous process from below. The expelling governments were more than happy to allow the myth of the “wild expulsions” to grow, since this myth enabled them to disclaim responsibility for the atrocities that were essential components of the expulsions. [21]

The worst of the violence in Poland occurred between mid-June and mid-July 1945, particularly in the districts bordering the Oder-Neisse demarcation line, which were designated by the Polish Army Command as a military settlement area. The commander of the Polish Second Army expressed on June 24, 1945 the Polish position on the rapid transfer of the Germans:

We are transferring the Germans out of Polish territory and we are acting thereby in accordance with directives from Moscow. We are behaving with the Germans as they behaved with us. Many already have forgotten how they treated our children, women and old people. The Czechs knew how to act so that the Germans fled from their territory of their own volition.

One must perform one’s tasks in such a harsh and decisive manner that the Germanic vermin do not hide in their houses but rather will flee from us of their own volition and then [once] in their own land will thank God that they were lucky enough to save their heads. We do not forget Germans always will be Germans. [22]

The Germans who were forced to resettle were usually allowed to take only 20 kilograms of baggage with them, and were escorted to the border by squads of Polish soldiers. In late June 1945, at least 40,000 Germans were expelled within a few days. One commentator described what this meant to the Germans living near the Oder-Neisse line:

The evacuation of individual localities usually began in the early morning hours. The population, torn from their sleep, had scarcely 15 to 20 minutes to snatch the most necessary belongings, or else they were driven directly onto the street without any ceremony. Smaller localities and villages were evacuated at gunpoint by small numbers of soldiers, frequently only a squad or a platoon. Due to the proximity of

the border, for the sake of simplicity the Germans were marched on foot to the nearest bridge over the river, driven over to the Soviet side [i.e., into the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany] and there left to their own fate.[\[23\]](#)

The German expellees were frequently robbed by members of the Polish militia and military units that carried out the expulsions. Food supply became an acute problem, and the uprooted Germans were often destitute and exhausted when they arrived in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany. The German expellees became easy prey for Soviet occupation troops, who often stole the few belongings the Germans had brought with them. Some Germans were beaten and raped, forced to perform humiliating acts, and some were randomly killed.[\[24\]](#)

Not all of the cross-border traffic of Germans was in a single direction. At the end of the war, many hundreds of thousands of Germans from the Recovered Territories who had fled the Red Army's advance to the west now returned to their homes. The returning Germans did not understand that there was not going to be a return home. The alarming spectacle of the population in the Recovered Territories of Poland actually increasing in the weeks after V-E Day was one of the factors spurring local authorities to quickly proceed with "wild expulsions" of the Germans. Polish troops and government officials used aggressive and often violent measures to prevent the unwanted Germans from returning to their homes.[\[25\]](#)

However great the hazards and miseries of life on the road were for the German expellees, they were usually preferable to the expulsion trains the Polish authorities began to operate. Taking up to two weeks to reach Berlin, the trains were typically not provisioned and lacked the most basic amenities. As a result the death rate on the trains soared. One passenger wrote:

In our freight wagon there were about 98 people, and it is no exaggeration to say that we were squeezed against each other like sardines in a can. When we reached Allenstein people started to die, and had to be deposited along the side of the rails. One or more dead bodies greeted us every morning of our journey after that; they just had to be abandoned on the embankments. There must have been many, many bodies left lying along the track....

The train spent more time stopping than moving. It took us more than 14 days to reach the Russian occupation zone. We rarely traveled at night....After a few days we had no more to eat. Sometimes, by begging the Polish driver, we were able to get a little warm water drawn from the engine....The nights were unbearable because of the overcrowding. We could neither keep upright nor sit down, much less lie down. We were so tightly squeezed together that it was impossible not to jostle each other occasionally. Recriminations and quarrels erupted, even attempts to exchange blows in the middle of this human scrum. The very sick suffered the worst. Typhus was widespread throughout the entire transport and the number of deaths grew with each passing day. You can well imagine the state of hygiene that prevailed in the wagon.[\[26\]](#)

A German priest who witnessed the arrival of German expellees at the border described what he saw:

The people, men, women, and children all mixed together, were tightly packed in the railway cars, these cattle wagons themselves being locked from the outside. For days on end, the people were transported like this, and in Görlitz the wagons were opened for the first time. I have seen with my own eyes that out of one wagon alone 10 corpses were taken and thrown into coffins which had been kept on hand. I noted

further that several persons had become deranged...The people were covered in excrement, which led me to believe that they were squeezed together so tightly that there was no longer any possibility for them to relieve themselves at a designated place.[\[27\]](#)

The worst of the violence appears to have been taken against the German minority in Czechoslovakia. A brief but intense outbreak of revenge-taking occurred across Czechoslovakia in May and June 1945 in response to the determination of German forces to continue fighting up to, and even after, V-E Day. Foreign observers and some Czechs themselves were shocked by the scale, the intensity, and the lack of discrimination of the reprisals against German civilians. One person wrote:

The end of the occupation was the beginning of the expulsion of German civilians, if they had survived the first hours and days of brutality. Retaliation was blind. An old woman was defenestrated; a member of a visiting German orchestra was beaten to death in the street because he could not speak Czech; others, not all of them Gestapo members, were hanged, doused with gas and lit, as living torches. Enraged mobs roamed through hospitals to find easy victims there. One [of those murdered] was a Czech patient, who happened to be the father of the writer Michael Mareš, but his papers listed a Sudeten birthplace. From May until mid-October official statistics listed 3,795 suicides of Germans in Bohemia.[\[28\]](#)

The Ministry of Education, the Military Prison, the Riding School, the Sports Stadium and the Labor Exchange in Prague were set aside as prisons for German civilians. The Scharnhorst School was the scene of a massacre in which groups of 10 Germans were led down to the courtyard and shot. In Strahov as many as 10,000 to 15,000 Germans were herded into the football stadium. Here the Czechs forced 5,000 prisoners to run for their lives as guards fired on them with machine guns. Some Germans were shot in the latrines. As a general rule all SS men were shot, either by a shot in the back of the neck or to the stomach. Even after May 16, 1945, when order was meant to be restored, 12 to 20 Germans died daily at the Strahov Stadium. Most of the victims had been tortured first.[\[29\]](#)

The worst atrocities during this period in Czechoslovakia were perpetrated by troops, police and others acting under color of authority. In a compound at Postoloprty in northern Bohemia, parties of up to 250 Germans at a time were removed and shot by Czechoslovak soldiers on June 5 and 6. The precise number of Germans killed ranges from a low of 763 (the number of bodies unearthed in 1947) to a high of 2,000. In a similar incident at Kaunitz College in Brno a Czechoslovak investigation found that at least 300 Germans died as a result of torture, shooting or hanging in May and June 1945.

On June 18, 1945, Czechoslovak troops shot 265 German civilians in the back of the neck and buried them in a mass grave the Germans had first been forced to dig beside a railway station. At Lanškroun, a two-day "People's Tribunal" conducted by a prominent member of Beneš's party resulted in 20 people who were shot; two hanged; others tortured; and others drowned in the town's fire pool. In the city of Chomutov on the morning of June 9, up to a dozen Germans were tortured to death in a "cleansing operation" conducted by Staff Captain Karel Prášil on a sports field in full view of sickened Czech passersby.[\[30\]](#)

On May 30, 1945, under threat from a trade union headed by the Communist activist Josef Kapoun, the mayor of Brno agreed to an expulsion action against German civilians that same evening. The first column of expellees was marched off in the general direction of the Austrian frontier. A second group of German expellees, rounded up from neighboring villages and towns, followed them a few hours later.

The German expellees, who by now numbered some 28,000, were denied permission to cross into Austria by the Allied occupation authorities. Rather than allowing the Germans to return home, the Brno activists responsible for the expulsion confined them in a collection of impromptu camps in the border village of Pohořelice. Lacking food, water or sanitary facilities, 1,700 Germans are estimated to have died in these camps.^[31] A Red Cross nurse estimated that an additional 1,000 expellees died on the march to the camps.^[32]

In light of the euphemistically styled “excesses” of May and June, some Czechoslovak policymakers and western correspondents began to criticize the Czech actions. For example, F.A. Voigt, longtime diplomatic correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, wrote that the Czechs themselves were adopting “a racial doctrine akin to Hitler’s...and methods that are hardly distinguishable from those of Fascism. They have, in fact, become Slav National Socialists.”^[33]

The Czechoslovak government, however, never seriously attempted to rein in the agencies over which it exercised control. Czech leaders realized that nothing but the application of force on a massive scale could rid Czechoslovakia of its German population. Too much terror might result in at worst some embarrassment abroad; too little terror would prevent the success of the operation. Beneš implicitly acknowledged as much in a speech broadcast on Radio Prague: “We are accused of simply imitating the Nazis and their cruel and uncivilized methods. Even if these reproaches should be true in individual cases, I state categorically: Our Germans must go to the Reich and they will go there in any circumstances.”^[34]

The Czechoslovak government introduced numerous measures discriminating against their German minority. Germans could go out only at certain times of day; they were forced to wear white armbands, sometimes emblazoned with an “N” for *Němec* or German; they were forbidden from using public transportation or walking on the pavement; they could not send letters or go to the cinema, theater, or pub; and they could not own jewelry, gold, silver, precious stones and other items. They were issued with ration cards, but were not allowed meat, eggs, milk, cheese or fruit, and had restricted times for buying food. The Germans were also sometimes forced to work as slaves on farms, in industry, or in the mines.^[35]

For many Germans an aspect of the expulsions was blatant theft. Czech president Edvard Beneš was quoted as saying: “Take everything from the Germans. Leave them only a handkerchief to sob into.”^[36] Beneš declared all Germans and Hungarians to be politically unreliable and their possessions were therefore to fall to the Czech state.^[37]

The Czech partisans frequently took anything that appealed to them, and sometimes simply moved into a German’s house, appropriating the former owner’s possessions. In 1945 there were many instances of farmworkers appropriating German farms, junior doctors taking over German medical practices, and junior managers taking over German businesses. There were cases of pure opportunism: Czechs who had formerly moved in German circles suddenly became the apostles of Czech nationalism and hunted down former German acquaintances. Once the wilder days were over, the new Czech Republic moved to regulate the plunder of German property so that the booty reverted to the state.^[38]

Throughout the summer of 1945, trains of German expellees continued to pour into Berlin and other German and Austrian cities. The Western journalists who had traveled to Berlin to cover the Potsdam

Conference were aghast at the scenes they encountered at the railroad stations, with dead and dying littering the platforms. Charles Bray, Germany correspondent of the *London Daily Herald*, described finding four dead Germans on a visit to Stettin Station, with “another five or six...lying alongside them, given up as hopeless by the doctor, and just being allowed to die.” Bray discovered the suffering of the German expellees “gave me no satisfaction, although for years I have hoped that the Germans would reap the seeds they had sown.” [39]

Several observers compared the fate of the German expellees to the victims of the German concentration camps. Maj. Stephen Terrell of the Parachute Regiment stated: “Even a cursory visit to the hospitals in Berlin, where some of these people have dragged themselves, is an experience which would make the sights in the Concentration Camps appear normal.” [40]

Adrian Kanaar, a British military doctor working in a Berlin medical facility, reported on an expellee train from Poland in which 75 had died on the journey due to overcrowding. Although Kanaar had just completed a stint as a medical officer at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, what he witnessed of the expellees’ plight so distressed him that he declared his willingness to face a court martial if necessary for making the facts known to the press. Kanaar declared that he had not “spent six years in the army to see a tyranny established which is as bad as the Nazis.” [41]

Gerald Gardiner, later to become Lord Chancellor of Great Britain, had been a member of a volunteer ambulance unit working with concentration camp survivors. Gardiner stated with regard to the expellee trains arriving in the late summer and autumn of 1945 from the Recovered Territories, “The removal of the dead in carts from the railway stations was a grim reminder of what I saw in early days in Belsen.” [42]

Robert Murphy, a career diplomat who had served as Gen. Eisenhower’s political advisor and was now the State Department’s senior representative in Germany with the rank of ambassador, became concerned about the Allied mistreatment of the German expellees. Murphy stated with regard to the German expellees:

In viewing the distress and despair of these wretches, in smelling the odor of their filthy condition, the mind reverts instantly to Dachau and Buchenwald. Here is retribution on a large scale, but practiced not on the Parteibonzen [Party leaders], but on women and children, the poor, the infirm. The vast majority are women and children....

Our psychology adjusts itself somehow to the idea that suffering is part of the soldier’s contract...That psychology loses some of its elasticity, however, in viewing the stupid tragedy now befalling thousands of innocent children, and women and old people....The mind reverts to other recent mass deportations which horrified the world and brought upon the Nazis the odium which they so deserved. Those mass deportations engineered by the Nazis provided part of the moral basis on which we waged the war and which gave strength to our cause.

Now the situation is reversed. We find ourselves in the invidious position of being partners in this German enterprise and as partners inevitably sharing the responsibility. [43]

An eyewitness report of the arrival in Berlin of a train which had left Poland with 1,000 German expellees aboard reads:

Nine hundred and nine men, women, and children dragged themselves and their luggage from a Russian railway train at Leherte station today, after 11 days traveling in boxcars from Poland.

Red Army soldiers lifted 91 corpses from the train, while relatives shrieked and sobbed as their bodies were piled in American lend-lease trucks and driven off for interment in a pit near a concentration camp.

The refugee train was like a macabre Noah's ark. Every car was jammed with Germans...the families carry all their earthly belongings in sacks, bags, and tin trucks...Nursing infants suffer the most, as their mothers are unable to feed them, and frequently go insane as they watch their offspring slowly die before their eyes. Today four screaming, violently insane mothers were bound with rope to prevent them from clawing other passengers.

"Many women try to carry off their dead babies with them," a Russian railway official said. "We search the bundles whenever we discover a weeping woman, to make sure she is not carrying an infant corpse with her." [44]

The stated rationale during the war for the transfers had been to remove a cohort of dangerous Germans—above all, fit men of military age—who might threaten the security of the countries in which they lived. Instead, it was women, children, and old men who were deported, while the fit men had been held back for slave labor.

Earl Ziemke wrote of the expelled Germans: "...Only 12% could be classified as fully employable; 65% needed relief. Contrary to agreements made before the movement to keep families together, the countries expelling Germans were holding back the young, able-bodied men. Of the arrivals 54% were women, 21% were children under 14 years, and only 25% men, many of them old or incapacitated." [45]

The period of the "wild expulsions" had involved massive state-sponsored programs of targeted violence, resulting in a death toll of many hundreds of thousands of Germans. Yet it was an episode that escaped the notice of many Europeans and virtually all Americans. **From its signing on August 2, 1945, the Allies would attempt to administer the expulsions in the "orderly and humane" manner specified by the Potsdam Agreement.** However, the so-called organized expulsions turned out to be no more orderly and humane than the "wild expulsions" had been.

Notes

[1] Dietrich, John, *The Morgenthau Plan: Soviet Influence on American Postwar Policy*, New York: Algora Publishing, 2002, p. 137.

[2] MacDonogh, Giles, *After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation*, New York: Basic Books, 2007, p. 162.

[3] Naimark, Norman M., *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 108.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

- [5] De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 83.
- [6] Naimark, Norman M., *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001, pp. 109-110.
- [7] De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 88.
- [8] Dietrich, John, *The Morgenthau Plan: Soviet Influence on American Postwar Policy*, New York: Algora Publishing, 2002, p. 145.
- [9] De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 88.
- [10] Dietrich, John, *The Morgenthau Plan: Soviet Influence on American Postwar Policy*, New York: Algora Publishing, 2002, p. 137.
- [11] Naimark, Norman M., *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 110.
- [12] *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.
- [13] De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 86.
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- [15] *Ibid.*
- [16] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- [17] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- [18] Russell, Bertrand, *The London Times*, Oct. 23, 1945, p. 5.
- [19] Keeling, Ralph Franklin, *Gruesome Harvest: The Allies' Postwar War against the German People*, Torrance, Cal.: Institute for Historical Review, 1992, p. 13.
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